

Los Padres Objection Issue Summary - NEPA

Objectors:

Richard W. Halsey, California Chaparral Institute

Bruce Whitcher, Central Coast Motorcycle Association and the California Off Road Vehicle Association

Summary:

Objectors are concerned about the use of best available science and the adequacy of the range of alternatives analyzed.

Best Available Science – CCI: “We object to the USFS’s response in the LMP Amendment to the suggestion we made to apply the best available science, including USFS scientist Dr. Jack Cohen’s, in determining how the Forest Service manages chaparral near communities. The USFS responded that incorporating such science was “outside the scope of this analysis.” We find such a conclusion unsupportable since the main reason for fuel treatments is to protect communities... Such an approach would guide individual projects and would avoid the repetitive nature of comment letters from us and others that continually remind the USFS that conducting landscape level fuel treatments, 300 foot buffers, and cool season prescribed burns unnecessarily damage the chaparral and are not scientifically supportable or cost effective in terms of structure protection.”

Range of Alternatives: - CORVA: The objectors state that the Forest Plan Amendment fails to include an adequate range of alternatives and is therefore inconsistent with NEPA regulations. They also state that the Los Padres would receive disproportionate BCNM rezoning in comparison to the other Southern California Forests, gaining 294,250 acres in the BCNM category, which would rezone over 90% of Los Padres existing land use zones, exclusive of wilderness, as BCNM. The objectors contend that the preferred alternative does not provide reasonable public access. They suggest that the range of alternatives would be improved by including an alternative that included in the range of 75% or approximately 150,000 acres of BCNM for the Los Padres. The suggested alternative would retain key connecting routes to provide continuity of the transportation system or opportunities for rerouting problem sections of road and trail in BC zoning.

Review Team Analysis:

Best Available Science: As stated in the Response to Comments, the issue related to use of best available science in project design is beyond the scope of this analysis, which is to amend LMP land use zone allocations for select IRAs and to amend LMP monitoring and evaluation protocols. in response to the terms of the Settlement Agreement between the Forest Service, State of California, and other settlement parties.

The use of research to design fuels management treatments is best considered at the project level. It would be appropriate to consider the research suggested by the objector in designing site-specific projects - it is important to consider recent and emerging science on chaparral ecology

and structure protection for fuels treatments. The Forest Service has not rejected the objector's suggestion to use best available science, but rather has stated that the science suggested by the objector is more appropriately applied at the project level than at the Land Management Plan level.

Range of Alternatives: Based on the requirements in the Settlement Agreement, the Forest Service developed one alternative that emphasized rezoning to BCNM (Alternative 2) and one alternative that emphasized rezoning to RW (Alternative 3). A third alternative was developed in response to comments (Alternative 2a). The current zoning constituted the No Action alternative (Alternative 1.)

The range of alternatives includes all possibilities inherent in the No Action Alternative (Alternative 1) and the other alternatives considered in detail. Since all the zoning in the No Action Alternative was analyzed, the analysis in the FSEIS does include the option requested by the Objector, even though that option was not specifically named and analyzed separately.

The draft decision would retain the current DAI zones and maintains current zoning for roads and motorized trails through designation of a 200 foot buffer on either side of these routes (LPNF Draft ROD, pg. 3). Thus, current motorized recreation opportunities would be maintained by the draft decision.

The LPNF Draft ROD specifically considers motorized trails on the Los Padres NF. Adjustments to the alternatives were made after scoping and in response to comments on the Draft SEIS to maintain motorized trail opportunities, including retention of the current zoning adjacent to the Gold Hill road and the Quail Trail areas. In addition, a forest specific standard (LPNF S2) would allow motorized use of trails in BCNM if the trail construction is conditioned on permanent closure of the Toad Springs Trail.

REMEDY(S) PROPOSED BY OBJECTORS

- Use best available science, including the work of Dr. Jack Cohen, to design fuels treatments near communities, in order to promote health of the chaparral community and provide cost-effective structure protection. (CCI)
- Analyze an alternative that includes in the range of 75% or approximately 150,000 acres of BCNM for the Los Padres. Retain BC zoning in locations for key connecting routes to provide continuity of the transportation system or opportunities for rerouting problem sections of road and trail. (CCMA & CORVA)

INSTRUCTIONS BEING CONSIDERED

- None.